The Story of Victor Kessler:
The Barefoot Baron

Victor Kessler adjusted the knot of his silk tie, admiring his reflection in the dusty bathroom mirror of the rundown bank. His suit, a deep navy pinstripe, glimmered faintly in the dim light. The goatee he had carefully oiled caught the shine, making his smug grin look even more self-satisfied.

"Ah... Victor, old boy," he murmured to himself, "you've outdone yourself yet again."

He tugged off his polished leather shoes, slipping his thick, pale feet onto the cold tiled floor. A shiver ran through him, not from the chill but from the anticipation of what was about to happen.

***Two-hundred and fifty feet. That's all I need. Two-hundred and fifty feet of dominion,* he thought, pressing his toes firmly to the ground.**

Instantly, the awareness spread out from him like invisible ripples in a pond. He could *feel* the heartbeat of every guard, the nervous twitch of the cashier at the counter, the bored sigh of a clerk shuffling papers.

"Now then," he whispered with a chuckle, "let's dance."

The bank guard nearest the vault suddenly stiffened. His hand, which had been idly resting on his hip, moved with robotic certainty to swipe his access card. Victor smirked as the heavy vault door creaked open.

"Perfect posture, lad. You'll make an excellent butler when I'm through with you."

From the outside, anyone watching would only see a portly man in a fine suit standing barefoot in the middle of a lobby. But in Victor's mind, it was a symphony — a dozen puppets dancing on invisible strings.

He strutted toward the vault, barking orders like a conductor leading an orchestra.

"You there—yes, yes, my lovely cashier—bring me the cash in neat bundles. Don't fumble now. And you, guard number two, stand tall by the door. If anyone thinks about playing hero, well..." His eyes glimmered with wicked amusement. "You'll shoot them for me."

Victor licked his lips as bags of money and trays of gold were carried before him. His mind buzzed with thoughts, not just of wealth, but of the sheer *power*.

Why settle for riches when I have kingdoms at my feet? Politicians, generals, kings... if they stand on the same ground as me, they are mine. Mine!

He spoke aloud, unable to contain his greed.
"Victor Kessler — Master of Flesh and Fortune. Oh, the headlines will love that."

One of the clerks whimpered as she handed him a pouch of jewels. Victor crouched down, his bare feet still pressed firmly to the floor tiles, and patted her trembling cheek.

"There, there, darling. Don't take it personally. I'm simply... gifted. And the world owes

men like me its treasures. After all…" He leaned closer, whispering with sinister intimacy, "who else could take them so elegantly?"

As he rose, his thoughts turned darker.

But there will be challengers. There always are. Fools who believe guns, or courage, or righteousness can undo me. Let them come. I'll peel their bravery from their bones and make them sing my song instead.

A laugh burst from him — deep, booming, and theatrical. The possessed guards and clerks joined in, their voices hollow and lifeless, echoing his mirth like a ghastly choir.

With bags of wealth slung over his shoulders, Victor strolled barefoot out of the bank and into the street, the crowd parting before him in confused terror. He raised his arms wide, like a preacher before his congregation.

"My name is Victor Kessler!" he roared. "Remember it well, for it is the name of the man you cannot stop!"

He wiggled his toes against the asphalt, feeling the pulse of hundreds of people at once. Power, intoxicating and limitless, surged through him.

And in that moment, Victor Kessler felt not like a man, but like a god.

Victor Kessler's Reign of Heists

The papers were already calling him *The Barefoot Baron*.

Victor hated the name at first. It sounded silly, cartoonish even. But the more headlines he clipped and framed on the walls of his penthouse, the more it grew on him.

The Barefoot Baron. Yes… there's poetry in it. They laugh at first, then they learn to fear it. And fear, after all, is the finest currency.

Heist #1 — The Opera House Robbery

Victor leaned against a marble pillar in the grand opera hall, tuxedo immaculate, a glass of champagne in hand. The chandelier's light gleamed off his bald spot, but he carried himself with the confidence of a king.

"Exquisite, isn't it?" he said to the woman beside him, a duchess dripping with diamonds. His eyes flickered briefly to her necklace. "Almost as if it were made for me."

When the orchestra swelled, Victor slipped his patent-leather shoes off under the tablecloth. His toes brushed the polished floor.

And now the performance begins.

Half the crowd froze mid-applause as his will gripped them. Waiters carrying trays staggered forward, depositing caviar and champagne at Victor's table. The duchess herself stood, unfastened her necklace, and laid it in his palm with a vacant smile.

Victor chuckled, swirling his drink.
"Ah, music to my ears. An encore, perhaps? Yes... all jewels to me, my dear guests."

By the time the final note rang from the stage, Victor was gone, jewels in hand, the audience waking in confusion.

Heist #2 — The Train of Gold

Weeks later, Victor sat barefoot atop a moving train, the wind whipping through his suit. Beneath him, soldiers inside the cars shuffled like marionettes, loading bars of gold into satchels.

"Look at them, so loyal now," Victor muttered. "Not to a flag, not to a king, but to me. And I didn't even need a single bullet."

A soldier inside tried to resist, his will flickering. Victor's face twisted in irritation. He pressed his feet harder onto the roof, voice booming.

"Don't fight me, boy. There's no shame in service. Better to be my puppet than a corpse!"

The soldier's eyes glazed again. Victor smiled.
"That's better. Carry the gold like the good dog you are."

Heist #3 — The Museum of Eternity

The museum's vault was said to be impenetrable. But Victor knew walls and locks meant nothing when flesh was his ladder.

Barefoot, he strode through the corridors. Guards turned keys, punched codes, and opened sealed doors, all without protest.

Victor admired a glittering crown on its pedestal. He lifted it slowly, savoring the weight.

This crown once ruled empires. Now it crowns me — the true emperor of mankind.

He placed it on his head, looked into a glass case, and grinned at his reflection.
"Yes, Victor Kessler. You are history reborn."

Victor's Thoughts on His Power

Later, sprawled on a velvet sofa with piles of stolen treasures around him, Victor mused aloud:

“Money. Gold. Jewels. They’re lovely, yes… but fleeting. What matters is the *legend*. The Barefoot Baron, the man who walks unopposed, who turns cities into puppets. I could steal the world itself, if I cared to.”

He sipped brandy, toes wriggling against the carpet.
“But no, no… that would be too easy. The fun is in the game. In making them *try* to stop me. Oh, the delicious taste of their failure…”

His laughter filled the penthouse, echoing among the mountains of ill-gotten wealth.

The Beginning of the Fall of Victor Kessler

It was late afternoon at his penthouse and Victor Kessler was enjoying himself to his expensive brandy and club sandwich, he thought nothing could go wrong on his perfect day of being king of the world.

But then suddenly he coughed into his silk handkerchief, annoyed at the sudden fit that rattled his chest. He frowned as he drew it away — a spatter of dark red stained the cloth.

“Blood,” he muttered, eyes narrowing. “Hmph. Probably nothing. A touch of the weather, perhaps.”

But then as time went on, his coughs came more often, violent enough to leave him breathless. Even during heists, while gold and jewels were carried obediently into his waiting arms, he sometimes had to turn his head and spit crimson into the shadows.

One morning, after nearly collapsing in his penthouse, Victor reluctantly visited his

personal physician — a thin, nervous man whose silence was bought with fat stacks of hundreds.

The doctor cleared his throat after reading the scans. His hands shook as he spoke. "Mr. Kessler... I'm afraid the results are clear. You have advanced-stage lung cancer. Terminal. At best... you only have a few months left to live."

Victor froze. His smirk vanished. For the first time in years, silence fell over him.

"Terminal?" His voice was a low growl. "No, no... you must be mistaken. I am Victor Kessler. I am unstoppable."

The doctor lowered his gaze and shook his head. "I'm sorry."

Victor stormed out, clearly upset, his thoughts were racing.
"Me? Dying? Impossible. I am not meant to end like some wretch coughing in the gutter. If I must buy life with more money, then so be it. No vault is beyond me."

The Failed Heist

He planned another robbery — this time of a pharmaceutical convoy carrying experimental treatments.

But as Victor stood barefoot in the street, commanding soldiers to lower the crates, a hacking cough overtook him. His vision blurred. He stumbled, clutching his chest.

"No, damn it—move! Obey me!" he barked, his voice breaking into wheezes.

The soldiers faltered. One snapped free of his control long enough to fire a shot into the air, raising the alarm. Sirens wailed in the distance.

Victor swore, forcing his power outward like a net, barely seizing enough control to stagger away with his life. He collapsed into the night, coughing blood onto the pavement.

The Motel Room

Hours later, he checked into a seedy motel on the edge of town. The wallpaper peeled. The air stank of mildew and cigarette smoke. He lay back on the creaking bed, bare feet resting against the cold metal bedframe.

His breathing was ragged. Sweat soaked through his shirt.
Is this what I've become? Victor Kessler, the great Baron, reduced to a sick old man hiding in filth?

He spat a thick clot of blood onto the floor, laughing bitterly.
"Pathetic. They'll never remember me like this. I need... a way out. A new vessel. Yes... yes, if I can control flesh, why not live inside it?"

As he pondered, a cockroach crawled up the bedframe, antennae twitching. Victor's eyes locked on it, and for the first time in days, a smile curved his lips.

"Of course. Life is life. Even vermin."

He pressed his bare toes against the metal rail, focusing, reaching. His consciousness slid

outward, seizing the tiny creature. His awareness shrank, twisted, until he was scuttling along the wall on six legs.

Victor, now inhabiting the body of a roach, witnessed his own dying human body which is now in a deep coma from having lost its consciousness, and marveled at the striking size difference.

Victor laughed — or rather, the laugh echoed in his mind.
“Marvelous! Small, yes... but alive! I’ll find a new stronger and a more physically fit body, something young, something attractive.
The Baron will on live forever!”

The Sudden End of Victor Kessler

Victor as the roach crawled over the bare toes of his former human body and jumped down the bed and onto the floor

He darted out of the motel door, weaving across the sidewalk.
But fate had other plans.

A random passerby, unaware, brought his boot down on him with a sickening crunch.

Victor’s tiny body burst. His mind screamed briefly — then everything went black. The passerby was disgusted to have accidentally stepped on victor as a roach accidentally, but was unaware that the consciousness of an infamous criminal was inhabiting it.

Victor’s comatose human body then convulsed violently simultaneously at the motel as he felt the fatal force of being crushed in the roach’s body. Blood streamed from his mouth and nose, staining the sheets. His wide eyes stared at the ceiling, empty, unseeing. He soon stops breathing and moving before he then passes away.

Victor Kessler, the Barefoot Baron, Master of Flesh and Fortune, had finally lost the only heist he could never win: the theft of time.

His soul and consciousness presumably drifts off into the afterlife, far away from the smooshed juicy cockroach remains beneath a boot.

The Aftermath of Victor’s Death

Victor Kessler’s body lay motionless in the dingy motel bed, his bare feet hanging limp against the iron rails. His suit, once immaculate, was soaked through with sweat and blood. His eyes stared blankly at the water-stained ceiling, frozen in a last expression of disbelief.

For all his power, his wealth, and his arrogance, there was no audience

now. No gold, no puppets, no thunderous laughter. Only the quiet hum of a flickering neon sign outside and the stench of sickness in the air.

The Barefoot Baron was no more.

Fortunately, the motel owner later on noticed that Victor hadn't checked out and went to discover Victor's corpse before it had the chance to decompose and foul up the room, he promptly called 911.

After some hours later...

Autopsy Report: Victor Emil Kessler

Case Number: #2749-A
Name: Victor Emil Kessler
Age: 54

Sex: Male
Ethnicity: Caucasian
Height: 5′4″
Weight: 381 lbs
Date of Examination: [Redacted]

External Examination:

- **Body of a well-fed, middle-aged male, dressed in stained formal attire.**
- **Eyes open, sclerae bloodshot, fixed in mid-dilation.**
- **Blood noted around mouth and nostrils, dried and pooled on bedding beneath head.**
- **No signs of external trauma, forced entry, or defensive wounds.**
- **Feet bare; soles show signs of callusing consistent with frequent barefoot activity.**

Internal Examination:

- **Thoracic cavity revealed severe bilateral pulmonary involvement. Both lungs heavily infiltrated with tumors, advanced necrosis, and scarring.**
- **Numerous blood clots and extensive hemorrhaging within lung tissue.**
- **Heart enlarged, showing signs of chronic stress and strain.**
- **Liver fatty, indicative of long-term alcohol abuse.**
- **Stomach contents: traces of brandy and partially digested steak.**

Cause of Death:

- **Primary: Advanced stage IV non-small cell lung carcinoma.**
- **Secondary: Massive pulmonary hemorrhage resulting in asphyxiation.**

Manner of Death: Natural (complicated by chronic illness).

Notes:
(The decedent showed no immediate signs of foul play. Witnesses report a solitary stay in a low-grade motel prior to discovery. Despite his public reputation as a wealthy criminal figure, he died alone, in poor physical condition, without medical assistance.)

Victor Kessler’s corpse lay under the harsh fluorescent light of the morgue. His once-pristine suit had been cut away during the examination, leaving his pale, bloated frame exposed, scarred with the evidence of disease. His mouth was slightly open, dried blood crusted around his lips.

His body was already cleaned of all the blood and stitched back together, the Y-shaped incision sealed after the coroners had finished their work. Each of his organs had been removed, examined, placed into labeled containers, and weighed on the cold precision of the measuring scales, as was customary in their grim procedures.”

The coroner finished the last entry on the clipboard and gave a tired sigh.“Another one for the freezer. Strange, isn’t it? A man like this — in the headlines for years. And in the end, he dies just like anyone else.”

The assistants slid his body onto a steel gurney. His dead eyes, glassy and unblinking, caught the light for a moment before a sheet was pulled over his face. A toe tag bearing his name was also tied around his big left toe.

The wheels squeaked as they rolled him down the sterile corridor. At the far end, heavy steel doors groaned open, releasing a burst of frigid air. Inside, rows of numbered drawers lined the walls — silent guardians

of the forgotten dead.

Victor's body was lifted, wrapped, and placed into one of the long, narrow compartments. The drawer screeched as it slid inward.

For a moment, his lifeless form lay bathed in the cold blue light of the chamber. Then the door shut with a final metallic clang.

And so the legend ended — not with a heist, not with an empire of puppets bowing at his command, but with the cold, clinical silence of a morgue report.

No applause. No riches. No puppets bowing in obedience. Only silence and the hum of refrigeration.

Victor Kessler — the Barefoot Baron, master criminal, king of flesh and fortune —the man who once thought himself immortal, was now reduced to a tag on a toe and a place in the cold storage of the dead, his secrets locked away with him forever.

And with that, his story was over.

Or is it?

Only you can decide that, Markell.